

Glendale News Press

Study: Smoking down, obesity up

Report is the first to break out health information by the city's ZIP codes.

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The rate of smoking in the greater Glendale area has dropped to below 10%, according to a new study released this week.

The Glendale Community Needs Assessment, required by law every three years, identifies health trends to help Glendale Adventist Medical Center, Glendale Memorial Hospital, Verdugo Hills Hospital and nearly two dozen healthcare and social service agencies better tailor their services to local needs.

Many of the main service providers comprise the Glendale Healthier Communities Coalition, which heard the report on Tuesday.

The report found a decrease in the number of smokers from 15.3% of the population in 2002 to 9.3% in 2007 — the most recent data available. And with the city ratcheting up smoking restrictions in subsequent years, that ratio could fall even further.

David Marquez, executive director of the Crescenta Valley Drug and Alcohol Prevention Coalition and a member of the Glendale Healthier Communities Coalition, said he was heartened by the positive trends.

“What is happening with tobacco is astounding, because that is dealing with addictive products,” he said. “That gives you hope and belief that by being organized, informing the community and basically keeping on-task with the mission we have, we can succeed and reverse a trend.”

At the same time, waistlines are among the growing health concerns in Glendale.

The Glendale Community Needs Assessment found that 62% of area residents are obese or overweight, 4% more than in Los Angeles County as a whole, according to Gale Feldman, a researcher who presented the sweeping 300-page health report.

Coalition Chairwoman Camille Levee of the nonprofit Glendale Healthy Kids said the group will dig into the trove of demographic and health-care information for the 350,000 people who live in Glendale, Montrose and Eagle Rock and make recommendations for how to coordinate services.

“Exercise, fitness and nutrition are certainly key areas to address,” she said.

But the report contained other positive news. Glendale residents are giving birth to fewer undernourished babies than they were a few years ago, more locals have kicked their smoking habit and 96% of local children have health insurance — more than the county average of 93%.

“We’re doing something right, as far as getting our kids covered,” Feldman said.

The three most common causes of death in Glendale in 2007 — the last year for which data was available — was heart disease, at 28%; cancer, at 24%; and strokes, at 5%.

Feldman said death due to prostate and colon cancer is on the rise, while lung and breast-cancer-related deaths among women are declining.

Feldman reported that 73% of area children do not participate in enough physical activity to meet federal guidelines, though in a survey parents acknowledged Glendale offers a wealth of parks and recreational possibilities.

For the first time, the report broke down information by ZIP code, pointing out health-care needs and practices in detail. For example, 17 out of every 1,000 people in the Montrose ZIP code 91020 visited a local hospital for treatment of conditions that could have been prevented, while only 3.5 of 1,000 people living in the 91207 ZIP code, in Northwest Glendale, did so.